

## The Spread of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society in the Philippines



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**ABSTRACT:** The Thousand Islands Poetry Society is the most famous modern Chinese poetry society in the Philippines. It has promoted the understanding of Chinese poetry culture among Chinese Filipinos, promoted the development of Chinese-Philippine poetry, and given Chinese-Philippine literature a place in Philippine literature and increased the visibility of Chinese-Philippine literature in the Philippines and in East Asia and even in the world. This article will start with the establishment and contribution of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society in the Philippines, introduce the members and works of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society in detail, and explore several characteristics of the Thousand Islands poetry, such as the wandering spirit of the poet, the rootless, the homesickness, the expression of family affection, the care for the world and the Philippine characteristics. It is further found that Thousand Islands Poetry Society spreads Chinese Filipino poetry by publishing literary supplements, books, disseminating Wechat public accounts, holding lectures on Chinese Filipino poetry, interacting with Taiwanese poetry groups, and setting up youth poetry awards. The colorful activities have given more room for the creation of Chinese-Philippine poetry, inspired the creation of Filipino Chinese poetry, and showcased the unique poetic charm of Filipino Chinese poetry.

**KEY WORDS:** Thousand Islands Poetry Society; Filipino Chinese poetry; rootless.

### I. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND CONTRIBUTION OF THOUSAND ISLAND POETRY SOCIETY

The Thousand Islands Poetry Society is the most famous modern Chinese poetry society in the Philippines. It has promoted the understanding of Chinese poetry culture among Chinese Filipinos, promoted the development of Chinese-Philippine poetry, and given Chinese-Philippine literature a place in Philippine literature and increased the visibility of Chinese-Philippine literature in the Philippines and in East Asia and even in the world. Shirly(2002) who is professor of Dela Sa University defines the category of "Filipino Chinese" and defines Filipino Chinese literature as the minority literature of Philippine literature, that is mean Filipino Chinese literature is on the periphery of mainstream culture. She defines Chinese-Filipino literature as a minority literary discourse excluded from mainstream Filipino literature and as the work of Chinese-Filipino literary scholars published in any language or dialect. She critically analyze Chinese-Filipino poetry in order to examine how poets use poetic language to define Chinese-Filipino identity. Among the poems she analyzed were those of the Thousand of Islands.

Reasons for the establishment of Thousand Islands Poetry Society was mentioned by Yang( 3): "One group romantic poets either have a friendship or similar philosophy, and they can discuss the art of poetry with each other and meet to chat. So they want to start a poetry journal, as a public platform to publish poems or comment on poems, and also open to non-members to submit." On Valentine's Day 1985, ten poetry-loving poets celebrated this romantic day by drinking, laughing, and discussing poetry. Perhaps it was because of the wine, or perhaps because they had an idea in mind, that they discussed the formation of a poetry society, which they called the Thousand Islands Poetry Society.

*"I, being a thousand islanders, holy keep the kingdom of poetry: love poetry, read poetry, write poetry, and light the true beauty of poetry. Adhering to the spirit of the poetry society: with love and righteousness, sensual and rational, romantic and classical at the same time. We will pursue the purity and innovation of poetry throughout*

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*our lives and uphold the dignity and regulations of the poetry club. If you break your oath, you will be banished voluntarily"(Hong, 2015. 10.1).*

From this oath, the poets maintain their love for poetry, not only writing poetry, reading poetry but also appreciating poetry. The words were moving as their pledge and became the tenet of their actions and behavior.

The Thousand Islands Poetry Society has been established for nearly 40 years, and its members have written numerous works. Their works include insights into life, nostalgia for their homeland, doubts about identity, and expressions of family and friendship, as well as concern for East Asia, and the world as a whole. The Thousand Islands Poetry Society not only creates poetry but also organizes cultural exchange activities, thus promoting Chinese -Philippine poetry and passing on traditional Chinese culture, becoming a cultural bridge between China and the Philippines and a brand project of China-Philippine friendship. With the promotion of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, there has been a close cultural exchange between the Philippines and the mainland of China, and Taiwan. After 21st century, the Thousand Islands Poetry Society has promoted Chinese-Philippine poetry in more ways, such as organizing modern poetry lectures, Chinese-Philippine poetry exhibitions, and youth poetry competitions. The colorful activities have given more room for the creation of Chinese-Philippine poetry, inspired the creation of Filipino Chinese poetry, and showcased the unique poetic charm of Filipino Chinese poetry.

## II. DETAILED INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS AND WORKS OF THOUSAND ISLANDS POETRY SOCIETY

Members of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society are all of Chinese descent, mostly second or third generation Filipino Chinese, and although they were born and raised in the Philippines and are familiar with English and Tagalog, they compose poetry in Chinese. They learned about traditional Chinese culture under the influence of their fathers at home, they received Chinese education in Filipino-Chinese schools, and they grew up immersed in the Chinese community, so they have become the spokespersons for passing on traditional Chinese culture in the Philippines. They are Yue Qule, Xie Xin, Chen Mo, Bai Ling, Lin Quan, He Quan, Wu Tianji, Cai Ming, Wang Yong, and Pei Qiong; also Zhuang Zhiming, Jiang Yiya and Shi Wenzhi. They are the main poets of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society and have contributed to the establishment of the society.

Yue Qule, formerly known as Cai Jinglong, a native of Jinjiang, Fujian Province, born in the Philippines in 1941, is one of the founders and the second president of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society. The Selected Poems of Yue Qule won first place in the category of poetry in the literary creation of the Overseas Chinese Salvation Federation and the third Asean Literary Award (Wang 74).

Xie Xin is from Longyan, Fujian, originally from Shanghai, born in Taipei National University. Participated in the first Miss China pageant, worked as a radio announcer, Miss Air, and host. She married a Filipino son of a Chinese family and came to settle in the Philippines. She began writing poetry in 1982 and joined the Genesis Poetry Society in 1991 (Yang 77).

“Shi Wenzhi was awarded the 1984 Filipino Chinese New Poetry Award for best work, the 1985 Hedong Poetry Award for newcomers, and the second place in the prose category of the 1986 World Journal Literary Award. He was awarded the highest literary award by the Writers' Union of the Philippines in 2011” (Wang 182). He summarized the characteristics of Mr. Shi's poetry: taking the material of daily life, simple and concise, novel in intention, clear and crisp. “One of the characteristics of his poetry is that he has a great skill in Chinese characters and is good at making use of the characteristics of Chinese characters” (Shi 15).

Chen Mo, formerly known as Chen Feng Hui, is a Filipino native of Chinese descent, originally from Nan'an, Fujian, one of the founders of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, and former editor-in-chief of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society (Wang 182).

Wu Tianqi, originally from Jinjiang, Fujian, was born in the Philippines in 1940. He is the founding director of the Southeast Asian Chinese Poets and Poets Association and one of the founders of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society (Wang 100).

Wang Yong, originally from Jinjiang, Fujian, settled in Manila in 1978. He is a businessman and a poet, and has published thirteen books of modern poetry and criticism (Wang 46).

Cai Youming, a third generation Chinese born and raised in the Philippines, is a member of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society and a director of the Chinese Writers Association of the Philippines (Wang 226).

Generations of scholar-poets from the Thousand Islands Poetry Society have brought us the beauty of poetry, and I will not introduce them all here. From their poems, the following characteristics can be seen.

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## 1. Spiritual drift

“There are leaves, but no stems, there are stems, but no roots, there are roots, but no soil. It's a wild plant, the name is Huaqiao” (Sze et al. 2). This poem was written by Yun He. It portrays the living situation and mentality of overseas Chinese, who have left their hometowns, wandered the world and come out of their country to foreign countries. Filipino Chinese living in the Philippines, feel living in the periphery of Philippine society, is in a state of drift, the situation is very awkward. So there's anxiety, there's trepidation, there's a sense of exile from homeland. “A strong sense of dispersion used to be a mood with a universal character that flowed from Filipino Chinese writers in poetry, prose, and other art forms”(Rao 336).

“The years when our ancestors went to sea are blurred. I only know that in order to find a legendary peach blossom source, with tears set sail. We were left behind on a thousand islands, drinking coconut juice, talking about guitars and bare brown skin. And where are the sails of our ancestors? Where is the peach blossom source? ” (Sze et al. 182). He also described himself as “abandoned overseas, a useless piece of driftwood.” From He Quan's poetry, one can see the spiritual drift and search for roots of the Chinese mentality hidden behind.

Xie Xin reflects on the Chinese experience of "exile in the South Seas" through "Yishan", the place where overseas Chinese are buried, but only Yishan can be closer to the motherland, so that family ties can be maintained and blood ties can be preserved.

## 2. Homesickness

Homesickness is an emotion of missing one's hometown. When people are uprooted from their hometown and wandering without any support, they start to miss their hometown. For the first generation of Chinese Filipinos, the longing for home is the strongest. Due to various reasons, it was difficult for them to return to their homeland, and homesickness came up. They are very concerned about their hometowns and wish to return to them. Most Chinese are Chinese by nationality and Chinese by status, so their nostalgia is truly for their homeland. Not only the first generation of Chinese Filipinos, but also the second generation, who have been taught, influenced and influenced by their fathers and grandfathers, have a deep-seated sense of longing for China. Although most of them have never been to China, have long been cut off from their relatives in their homeland, and are basically no longer Chinese but Filipino, they have studied Chinese culture and their longing for China is as deep as that of their fathers.

For example, in the poem "Hometown"(Wang 102), Wu Tianqi bluntly uses the metaphor of not being able to leave “mother's womb” as a metaphor for not being able to leave the motherland. There is not only regional nostalgia, but also cultural nostalgia. Cultural nostalgia satisfies the Filipino Chinese poets' emotions, imagination and yearning for China. Xie xin's “Wangbin street”(Sze et al. 214) depicts imagery of ancestral poultices, lemon dew, Chinese cuisine, Wulong tea, and ink. The poem Snow of He Quan expresses homesickness through snow. There is no snow (Sze et al. 12) in the Philippines in summer, but the poet asks his family to send snow to the Philippines from hometown. How is this not a kind of longing for home? The poem "Autumn Thoughts" (Sze et al. 10) is a straightforward expression of longing for the homeland. In her poem “Chinese Knot”, Xie Xin, who moved to Taiwan when she was 10 years old and married in the Philippines in her 20s, says, "You are the most profound Oedipal and Oedipal feelings in my subconscious"(Yang 133).

## 3. Kinship

In addition to the two themes mentioned above, the poets of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society also express their feelings for their relatives and friends.

In addition to writing many times about the unquenchable feelings of the hometown, the poet also wrote many times about his relatives, such as "Children" (Sze et al. 56) by Yuequle, "Walking in my father's footprints (Sze et al. 104)" and "Sleeping in my mother's embrace" (Sze et al. 106) by Shi Wenzhi. The Thousand Islands Poetry Journal 1990, for example, contains poems from January to December of 1990. “Mother's love” by Zhuo PeiLin and "To the scavengers, the gift of the moon" by Nan Shanhe expresses the love for mother and friend on the path away. Thousand Islands Poetry Journal 2011-2012 includes poems from September 2011 to December 2012. These poems include nostalgia for family, love for home and country, and perceptions of life, and are a collection of poems. In particular, the poems on family and friendship are extremely infectious, such as Chen Jia Prize's "Family Letter", Shi Wenzhi's "Golden Wedding Commemoration", Nan Shanhe's "Mourning for the Moon Song" and so on.

## 4. Philippine characteristics

The Chinese Filipinos have their roots in the Philippines, and although their works are filled with nostalgia for their

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homeland, longing for family ties, and inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, growing up in this part of the Philippines, they are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the local Filipino cultural environment.

For example, Xie Xin's "Good Times" (Sze et al. 234) written while viewing the paintings of Filipino painters, evokes the ancient landscapes of the Philippines through tasting the paintings. "A Letter from Labrab to Magellan" (Sze et al. 208) described the hero Magellan fought with foreign invading Spanish colonists. "Grandma Suri" (Yang 29) described a gentle, kind old woman from the Philippines. Chen Jiazhao, whose pen name is Coconut and who is currently the vice president of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, also incorporates Filipino characteristics in his poems, such as "Filipino maids," "dried Philippine mangoes," and "coconut trees. He has also incorporated Filipino characteristics in his poems, such as "Filipino maids," "Dried Philippine mangoes," "Coconut trees," "Sunset in Manila," etc. As the times evolved and as the Chinese landed and took root, Weatherless' "Home on a Thousand Islands" shows that the poet's bloodline has flowed into the land of the Philippines. They are no longer expatriates in the South Seas, overseas, but owners of Home on a Thousand Islands, nationals rooted in the Philippines.

### 5. Care for the world

Thousand Islands poets not only focus on the inner world, but also on the outside world, not only showing depictions of China and the Philippines, but also the whole world. For example, Xie Xin uses "HaloHalo" (Sze et al. 200), a drink with Filipino characteristics, as a metaphor for the colorful Philippines, which is a mixture of jellies, ice creams, milk, puddings, etc.

*"The mestizo's style flashed through my mind- a blend of Spanish, American, Chinese, and jasmine scented Luzon. They say: it's all beautiful. It also symbolizes a cultural context of diversity - different languages, customs, habits, religions and ways of life, like a big city where people of all races gather, full of mysterious and complex fascination. .... So many colors, red, orange, yellow, green, green, blue and purple all shine in my arms" (Sze et al. 194).*

The Philippines is such a "mixed-race person". The Philippines is a "hybrid" people, with a diversity of religions, foods, languages, and customs. In the "garden" of poetry, Xie Xin imagines the world as a beautiful garden, where all kinds of national cultures exist, each emanating their beautiful figures. "The little garden I run with my own hands - a soft Persian carpet full of fairy tales. .... There is no longer any prejudice of skin color, racial discrimination, narrow national concepts and regional ideas" (Li 30).

## III. DISTRIBUTION METHODS OF THE WORKS OF THE THOUSAND ISLANDS POETRY SOCIETY

While the Filipino Chinese community has become increasingly commercialized over the past thirty years, the Thousand Islands Poetry Club has bucked the trend and insisted on meeting regularly to expand the poetry club's lineup. They promote, publish, and evaluate poetry in many ways.

### 1. Literary Supplement

Poets of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society published articles in the United Daily News, the World Journal, the Business Journal, and the Thousand Islands Poetry Journal. 1985, the Thousand Islands Poetry Society was founded and published in the United Daily News on the second Thursday of each month; in 2004, due to financial reasons and the death of certain key members, the Thousand Islands Poetry Journal ceased publication; in September 2011, the Thousand Islands Poetry Journal was published in the World Journal on the first Wednesday of the following month. In September 2011, Thousand Islands Poetry Journal published articles on the first Wednesday of each month in the World Journal. These works include both poetry works, poetry appreciation, poetry criticism, and poetry theory, which can improve both the poets' creativity and readers' appreciation, and promote the understanding of Chinese culture among Filipinos of Chinese descent.

### 2. Published Books

In 1987, a collection of poems from the Thousand Islands Poetry Society compiled by Ms. Chang Heung-Hwa named Rose and Tank was published; in 1991, Selected Poems from Thousand Islands and Thousand Islands Poetry Journal 1990 were published; Thousand Islands Poetry Journal 2011-2012 and Thousand Islands Poetry Journal 2013-2014; and in 2018, Selected Truncated Poems from Thousand Islands were published in Taiwan.

These books have expanded readers' access to Thousand Islands' poetry and have made it famous not only in the Philippines,

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but also on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. In addition to the poetry collections of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, there are also books published individually by the authors.

### **3. WeChat public number**

Thousand Islands Poetry Society registered its WeChat public name "Thousand Islands Poetry Society" in traditional Chinese characters in June 2017, changed it to "Thousand Islands Poetry Society of the Philippines" on October 7, 2017, and changed it to simplified Chinese characters on July 16, 2018. Thousand Islands Poetry Society of the Philippines". The micro signal is "qiandao1985\_ph". It marked the official entry of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society into the stage of Internet communication.

The content of Wechat is divided into several sections. The first section is a collection of photos of important moments from the founding of the poetry society to 2023. The photos of poets when they were young and vigorous in founding the poetry club, the photos of poets talking and gathering in high spirits, and the photos of poets not forgetting their passion for poetry even though they have entered middle and old age. The second part is the most important and meaningful part of the poetry recommendation for readers, including both video and text versions. From Yue Qule's "Room Wild" in June 11, 2017 to Su Rongchao's "Manila Sealed City One Year - A Record of Poetry" in March 30, 2021, this part include total 151 messages including not only recommended poems, but also the introduction of the poet or the appreciation of the poem.

The WeChat public website has opened up avenues of communication for the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, expanding the space for its dissemination and breaking the way it was confined to periodicals alone.

### **4. Filipino Chinese Modern Poetry Lecture**

Modern Poetry Lecture is the most famous event of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, which invites famous poets and scholars from mainland China and Taiwan to give lectures on poetry in the Philippines.

The first lecture was co-organized with the Thousand Islands Poetry Society under the auspices of the Yue Qule Arts Foundation, which invited the famous mainland scholar Mr. Chen Zhongyi and his wife Shu Ting to give a lecture in 2013. The second lecture, also sponsored by the Foundation and hosted by the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, featured Taiwanese poet Su Wenwei in 2015. The third lecture was held in 2017, inviting Taiwanese poets white collars to come and lecture. Renowned mainland poet Han Dong was invited to Philadelphia in 2019 to be the keynote speaker for the fourth edition of the lecture. The fifth lecture was held on the internet due to the epidemic, inviting Taiwanese poet Ye Sha to lecture.

### **5. Chinese Philippine Modern Poetry Exhibition**

The Philippine Chinese Modern Poetry Exhibition has been held for five editions so far in 1994, 1996, 2015, 2016, and 2019 respectively. It includes the introduction of traditional Chinese culture, poetry recitation, literary performance, painting, calligraphy, handicraft to interact with readers.

The second edition of the poetry exhibition was introduced on Facebook, and the fifth edition coincided with the traditional Chinese Dragon Boat Festival, which Hong proudly introduced in World Journal. Mr. Wong Chung Wong as the previous president of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society said: "Promoting the Dragon Boat Festival in the Philippines is also a way to promote Chinese culture and the best Chinese Filipino modern poetry. It is the mission of the Thousand Islands Poetry Club to continue to be a good platform for the Chinese Filipino Modern Poetry Exhibition. We hope this is a starting point to promote Chinese Filipino modern poetry to more Filipino-Chinese people and Filipinos" (Hong, 2019.6.4).

### **6. Interaction and exchange with poetry groups in Taiwan**

The idea of inviting Taiwanese poets to visit and lecture in the Philippines to promote academic exchanges between Filipino Chinese scholars and Taiwanese scholars came about when a group of Taiwanese poets came to the Philippines in 1987. After that, every two years the Thousand Islands Poetry Society invited Taiwanese poets to come to the Philippines to give lectures, and some members of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society such as Xie Xin, Yue Qulei and Bai Ling, became known as part of the Genesis Poetry Society. Not only that, the Thousand Islands Poetry Society also has exchanges with Taiwan Poetry Quarterly Magazine. In addition to interaction and exchange with poetry groups and scholars in Taiwan, the Thousand Islands Poetry Society has frequent exchanges with academic circles on the mainland of China. For example, it held a workshop on the works of Yue Qule in Fujian, China, and a workshop on the works of Ping Fan.



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### 7. Yue Qule Youth Poetry Award

The family members of Yue Qule, a former member of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society, established the Yue Qule Literary Foundation in 2011 to commemorate his contribution to poetry, encourage young people to write and create poetry, and inspire future generations to become more passionate about poetry. Since 2012, the Young Poets Award has been held for four consecutive years in the Philippines. Through the call for submissions, many young poets have joined the poetry club, witnessing the growth of a new generation of poets in the Philippines, and making the Thousand Islands Poetry Club the most active and youngest literary group in the Philippines.

### IV. CONCLUSION

It has been nearly 40 years since the establishment of the Thousand Islands Poetry Society. In these decades, the poets of the society have contributed to the establishment of the society, the preparation of the poetry journal, the spread of Chinese poetry in the Philippines, and the cultural ties between China and the Philippines.

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